

The Jervis Bay Underwater Photographic Shoot-out 2002

By Nigel Motyer.

Without doubt the greatest con ever perpetrated in diving has been the Australians convincing the rest of the world that the Great Barrier Reef is the must visit site for that continent. I first dived it about ten years ago and found it a huge disappointment. However around that time I also did a little diving well south of the GBR about 4 hours drive north of Sydney from a little town called Forster, in New South Wales. Here I found truly outstanding temperate water diving with amazing deep water sponge gardens and high concentrations of fish life. I always had it on my list of "gotta get back there" sites.

I was going to be taking some extended leave in April and May of this year so I was going to combine some diving with a family holiday. We had plenty of time so I had hoped to get in a few days on a liveaboard while my wife and daughter caught up with some relatives in Sydney. I remembered hearing that there was a liveaboard operating in the Jervis Bay area a few hours south of Sydney but I didn't know much about the place except that David Doubilet had covered the bay for National Geographic back in the mid eighties and by all accounts there were some good critters there. Good enough for Dave, then



Giant Cuttlefish

Nikon F801, 16mm fisheye, Subal Housing, Single Ikelite 150nicad flash. Fuji sensia 100 asa. 60th @ F8

These are amazing creatures and I was lucky to find this one out from under a ledge. The advantage of the 16mm is that you can get really close and still get that blue water in the background. I took six or seven shots here some with a passing diver overhead in silhouette but the divers lines were not clean and although you lose the sense of scale I preferred the "diver free" image.



Goby on Sea Tulip

Nikon F90x, 60mm macro, Subal Housing, Ikelite 200nicad flash with an MV flash as fill in. Fuji Velvia 50 asa. 125th @ F22

I had been checking all the Sea Tulip heads looking for the small cling fish that sometimes are found there. (Doubilet has a great shot of one in his Light in the Sea book) Anyway I never found the cling fish but I did find these small gobies on occasion. I shot half a roll on this fish being very creative with slow synch, back lighting and all that good stuff but in the end I preferred the bog standard, side on, no imagination shot.



General Reef Shot.

Nikon F801, 16mm fisheye, Subal Housing, Single Ikelite 150nicad flash. Fuji sensia 100 asa. 60th @ F5.6

The first shot on the first roll of film on the first dive. I had come hoping to see Sea Tulips but it was only as I settled on the bottom to take this photo that I realised they were everywhere. I took two shots but the school of fish had passed by on the second shot so this one had the edge.



Red Goat Fish

Nikon F90x, 60mm macro, Subal Housing, Ikelite 200nicad flash with an MV flash as fill in. Fuji Velvia 50 asa. 125th @ F 8

I was once told by a very well known photographer that if you are enetering a photo competition then use any colour you like as long as its Red. I found this goat fish and managed two shots before it took off. The first one has a slightly better exposure but the fish moved slightly allowing me get lower and set the Red against a black background - Red against black always works.

good enough for me.

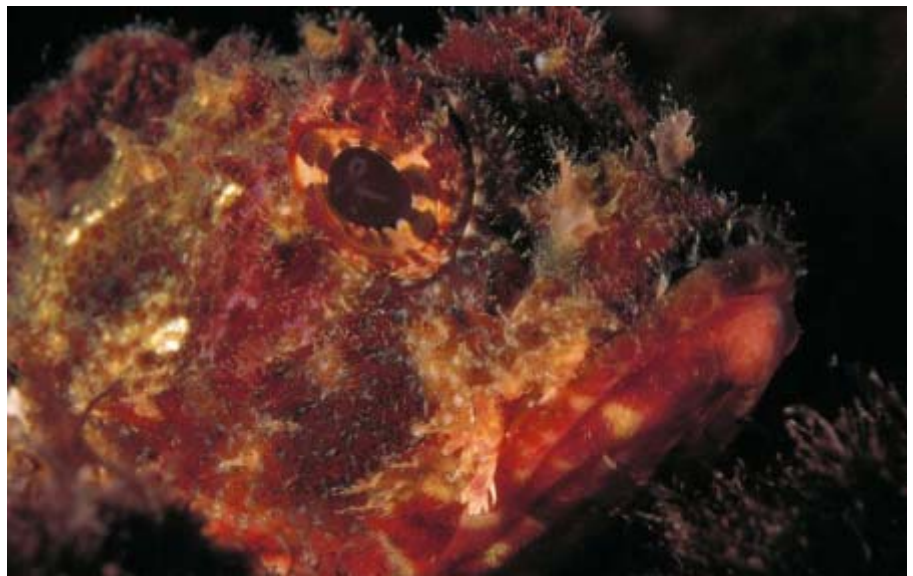
Having had no joy in locating local dive operators on the Internet I got a friend living in Sydney to get me some website contacts out of a local dive magazine and I sent off some e-mail enquiries. The first reply was from Lynn at Ocean Trek, a company operating an 18meter liveaboard catamaran in Jervis Bay which sounded just what I was looking for. Lynn offered several two day trips that would have suited my schedule but I wanted something a little longer. The only trip they had that offered 4 days of diving during my visit was the annual Jervis Bay Shoot-out competition. Although I was a little hesitant about getting involved in a competition, it did sound like the best option and it would be good to meet up with the local photographers so I booked it. The competition itself has been running now for five years and has been growing each year. The list of sponsorship is impressive and in the last few years the number of photographers wishing to enter has exceeded the amount of space on the boat so they have had to hold a draw for the places. As it turned out I was lucky enough to get one of those places. Once on the list, the organisation of the event was great. I got regular e-mails both from Lynn and also Mike Cufer, the competition organiser keeping me up to date with arrangements and even arranging a lift for me to the boat from Sydney.

So eighteen photographers gathered in Huskinson on Wednesday night, the 24th April to pick up the Ocean Trek and meet Mick and Lynn who run the

boat. I have to say the atmosphere during the competition was just so laid back. There was a huge sense of fun from all the competitors who have developed good friendships over the five years that the competition has been running. They did think I was just a little daft to travel all the way from Ireland to sample what was for them back yard diving but I would have to say that I thought the diving in Jervis bay to be just spectacular in terms of life and water clarity. This is temperate water diving, I used a 6mm wetsuit with a hood which was just right for me with a water temperature in the low twenties.

I had come with a wish list hoping to see a few of the local inhabitants, Sea Tulips, Weedy Sea Dragons and one of the famous three foot giant Jervis Bay Cuttle fish. As it turned out, that's a bit like turning up for a dive here hoping to see Kelp and a wrasse. My wish list was ticked off after the first ten minutes of the first dive and over the next few days I added to that Red Indian Fish, Blue Ringed Octopus, Blue Grouper and Sea Horses...the list goes on. The great advantage of it all was that all of these animals were completely new to me. I would get back on the boat raving about some wildly exotic critter only to point it out in the ID books and be told they were common as muck.

The competition itself was run over two days, Thursday and Friday with four dives each day. We each were given four rolls of Fuji Sensia to produce a portfolio of six images, two for each category, Macro, Wide Angle and Marine Life. At the end of each day a boat came out



Tight shead shot of a Scorpion fish

Nikon F90x, 60mm macro, Subal Housing, Ikelite 200nicad flash with an MV flash as fill in. Fuji Velvia 50 asa. 125th @ F16

There were lots of different scorpion fish in Jarvis Bay - I found this one and scanning it with a torch I could see the amazing reds in its head and eye colour. I also liked the texture in the head in this slide although if I was doing it again I would not be go tight in the frame.

to our anchorage to collect the completed films from that days shooting. They were then developed overnight and given back to you at breakfast the following morning so you could see how you were getting on. For those of you who know the area the diving was concentrated on two locations in the Bay. The first day we stayed at the Docks - a great site out on the northern mouth of the bay with some lovely caves and a rocky bottom tumbling down to sand in about twenty eight meters. On the second day, Friday, we moved to Bowen Island on the Southern entrance to the Bay and dived several sites there with spectacular visibility of well over thirty meters in beautiful blue water. These two sites are less than two miles apart but provided totally different diving in terms of underwater topography. On the seaward side of Bowen Island we dived steep

rocky drop offs down to over thirty meters while the lee side of the reef there had calm sheltered rocky outcrops and large patches of eel grass that provided a treasure hunt for night divers.

Saturday morning we had an hour or two to compile our submissions and then Mike was joined by Kevin and Cherie Deacon to make up the judging panel. They locked themselves into a cabin for the day while we knocked up three more dives (isn't it always the dives you do after the competition that give you the best images ?). On the Saturday night after dinner there was an open air slide show out on deck of all the images from each category. This was a great way of seeing how eighteen different photographers had approached the same subjects and there were some really fabulous images. In keeping with tradition the winners were announced in reverse order



Sea Horse on Sea Tulip

Nikon F90x, 60mm macro, Subal Housing, Ikelite 200nicad flash with an MV flash as fill in. Fuji Velvia 50 asa. 125th @ F11

I had never seen a seahorse and when I said that on the boat one of the fellow competitors said he'd show me one he'd found on an earlier dive, how unselfish is that ?!. It took us a while to find it again though and I ran into all sorts of decompression taking half a roll but it was well worth it from my perspective.

leaving me completely gobsmacked to pick up the top prize. Never mind winning the event but the first prize was a little bit special too, a dive trip to the Solomon Islands no less. In fact all the prizes were quite impressive. I think I'm right in saying that anyone who came 7th or higher won a prize of greater value than the actual cost of entering the competition. Its no wonder its so well subscribed.

No better nation than the Australians to party into the small hours. So Sunday morning was a little subdued but we still managed to get in two more dives before we steamed back to Huskinson, disembarked and headed back to Sydney.

Looking back at the event now what strikes me most about it was that whilst on the boat there was no hint that a competition was going on.. People openly shared

photographic ideas, hints and tips. On one occasion a photographer Gray McNeill, had found a seahorse. On the boat afterwards I mentioned that I had never seen one so on the next dive he went out of his way to bring me to that part of the reef so I could get the shot. Another competitor, Rob Westerdyk noticed that none of my shots had divers in them (the perils of travelling alone) and volunteered to model for me for a few dives. I got some great diver shots as a result. Interesting subjects were shared and I got a real sense that everybody wanted all the other competitors to do well. I thought that quite a unique and refreshing atmosphere in competitive underwater photography. I couldn't praise Lynn, Mick and Mike highly enough for the help they gave me in getting to the event and the way they ran the boat during the

competition. They had a complete understanding of the way underwater photographers want to dive and were always on hand to help out when needed.

So I am already planning my next dive trip to New South Wales - the Guys on the boat gave me great tips of places to visit and I only got to a few of those in the weeks after to competition. I terms of diving there is just so much of interest there for underwater photographers so yes my "Gotta get back there" list of dive sites just got longer.

For more details of the boat or a look at more images from the 2002 shootout check out the Ocean Trek website at www.oceantrek.com.au or e-mail at dive@oceantrek.com.au

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It should be pointed out that Nigel learned everything he knows on an underwater photography course given by Peter Rowlands in the Red Sea in the 1980's



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12ft baby humpback whale, Rurutu, September 2002. Photo by Jim Breakell.

